

In the Works

1988 Annual Conference Alumni Association of the UNC-CH Department of City and Regional Planning

Carolina Planning Staff

The Alumni Association of the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (DCRP) held a planning symposium and its first annual business meeting from February 5-7, 1988, at the Carolina Inn.

The symposium featured alumni and student presentations on current professional topics. Discussion topics included: state initiatives in economic development and technological policy; professional ethics; planning for large scale institutions; information systems; and planning education. In addition, alumni offered students informal job counseling sessions and scheduled interviews for permanent and summer employment.

Jesse White, Executive Director of the Southern Growth Policies Board, delivered the keynote address (reproduced in this issue) on the future of economic development in the South.

State Initiatives in Economic Development and Technological Policy

Professor Edward Bergman, referring to states as "laboratories of democracy," moderated the state initiatives panel. Ph.D. candidate Robert Atkinson discussed states' use of technology for economic development. He explained that states' past activities had failed to link technology and economic development until the 1970s, when states began looking to technology to help solve social and environmental problems. Today the link is stronger: states are moving away from "smokestack-chasing" toward new and small business creation. States can use technology even more effectively as an economic development tool. First, most states spend a great deal of money on university research, though there are many other ways to stimulate technological innovations (e.g., providing capital and management assistance). Second, states tend

to take a passive approach to profit and to technology in general: they see information, defined as data bases rather than personal communication, as the key to technology transfer. But interpersonal links between capitalists and entrepreneurs is the key.

Mary Beth Dugan, of the Southern Growth Policies Board, presented preliminary findings of a study on automated manufacturing in the South. Dugan said that the states' economic development efforts discussed by Atkinson "did not seem to matter to rural manufacturers," who did not take advantage of industrial extension services or other local information resources. Although the target of such services is small independent businesses, the study found no small automated firms. Perhaps the study's most startling conclusion was that few jobs had been lost as a result of automation: only four percent of firms surveyed said that jobs had been lost; 15 out of 51 said employment had actually increased after they had automated, due to the need for engineers. The fact that healthy firms tend to invest in automation might explain these figures.

Scott Bollens, of the North Carolina Commission on Jobs and Economic Growth, cited examples of North Carolina's economic development and technology initiatives, including the Microelectronics Center and the state's bids for Sematech and the Supercollider. Bollens addressed the problems of "policy, money, and politics" in his discussion of technology transfer, job training, and the provision of venture capital. The state-supported system of technology transfer centers is one of the most innovative in the country, but it is not without problems.

Job training is another area in which North Carolina is being innovative. The Jobs Training Partnership Act is being supplemented by state-funded programs; in addition to the traditional focus on dislocated workers and young workers, the state is focusing attention on the existing



Panel members discuss "Planning Education: Needs for the Nineties."

labor force. The "New and Expanding Industry Program" trains labor force participants changing jobs through the state's community colleges. The "Cooperative Skills Program" upgrades skills. Finally, North Carolina is the first state to use the interest from a portion of its unemployment insurance fund to create a worker training trust fund.

DCRP's Associate Professor, Michael Luger, spoke briefly on the problems with state economic development efforts. According to Luger, there are not enough appropriate programs, yet there are too many inappropriate ones. He suggested problems inherent in North Carolina's existing institutional structure: the Governor and Lieutenant Governor are from different parties; the position of Governor is weak; cabinet positions in the Department of Commerce and in the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development are outdated; state universities are losing faculty; and separate county school districts are creating inequities between rich and poor areas.

Ethical Issues in Planning

Tim Beatley, Assistant Professor at the School of Architecture, University of Virginia, coordinated the panel on the role of ethics in planning. Beatley initiated the discussion by raising broad questions concerning the role of ethics in professional practice and the ethics of planning methodologies and policies as tools for making decisions.

Michael Brooks, of the Department of Planning at Virginia Commonwealth University, perceived planning issues as falling into two categories. Microethics are applicable to individual matters, such as conflicts of interest, and macroethics encompass the group behavior of the profession as a whole. Brooks felt that the focus of attention should shift to include a more concentrated examination of issues on the macro level. He noted that the field has evolved from past decades, in which sensitivity to ethical issues ran high, to the present, when

planning is more "system maintaining" than "system challenging."

David Brower, of UNC-CH's Center for Urban and Regional Studies, pushed for the definition of principles within the profession to guide practitioners and provide them with a framework with which to act on issues faced within their individual specializations. Complicating the search for "principles to live by" are questions such as "what constitutes citizen participation," and "to whose interests is a mass transit plan responsible?"

Former Durham City Council Member Lanier Rand Fonvielle found parallels between the ethical dilemmas within the planning profession and the bioethical issues faced by those in the health care field. Although planners do not face the life and death situations of doctors, they do encounter issues that directly affect the quality of peoples' lives. Fonvielle stressed the value-laden realm of planning and the need for explicit revelation of motives and ideals. She felt that assumptions must be overtly presented in order to rationally consider the objectives of a decision.

The topics raised by the panelists sparked a lively discussion following the presentations. Challenges posed by "wicked dilemmas"—troubling situations in which ethical principles conflict and in which the ongoing nature of the problem allows few solutions—spurred debate. Would standards help in such a situation or are personal standards all that professionals can rely upon? While definitive answers proved difficult to find, these questions allowed for an extensive examination and affirmation of the value of professional standards, even if those standards are incomplete guides for professional behavior.

DCRP Student Presentations

Three of DCRP's Master's degree candidates delivered papers at the conference. The topics covered by the presentors included proposals for increased water conservation, plans for a bicycle route system in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, and opportunities for the redevelopment of the Schuylkill Falls public housing project in Philadelphia.

Mark Shea evaluated studies presently used to determine the effectiveness of water saving measures implemented during times of drought. He proposed three distinct recommendations to stress the need for greater water conservation provisions in water resource planning efforts: demand modification through water saving devices, educational efforts, and price incentives; adoption of drought conservation ordinances; and cooperative regional planning initiatives, which would coordinate the provision and sale of water and achieve a more efficient system of distribution.

Herbert Posner assisted in the design of a bicycle route system in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County. The proposed city routes will serve the entire metropolitan area, and

connect to the county routes, which will extend into all sections of Forsyth County. County routes will also feed into county parks, and to the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea Bicycle Highway, south of Winston-Salem. The area's hilly terrain complicated the system's design, restricting routes to hills with slopes of eight percent or less. A joint committee of citizens and government officials recommended additional routes and bicycle lanes along roads scheduled for widening.

Michael Cohen described his work with Rouse Urban Housing (RUH) in planning for the redevelopment of a 5.5-acre portion of the Schuylkill Falls public housing site. RUH is a Philadelphia-based development firm, specializing in the creation of affordable homes, apartments, and commercial space. This visible and controversial project presented the opportunity to create a large-scale affordable housing development.

Planning Information Systems

Bill Drummond, of the Georgia Institute of Technology's Department of Regional Planning, directed an instructional session on planning information systems. Composed of computerized overlays of geographic data, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) provides a powerful tool for the storage, retrieval, and analysis of spatial information. Planners are increasingly using GIS to maintain flexible data bases of land characteristics and to perform suitability analyses of land for development. Drummond explained the structure of the system and its advantages over earlier spatially-based information systems, such as Atlas Map and Autocad.

Jon Lockman, a planner with the City of Winston-Salem, lent a practical perspective to Drummond's description through his discussion of Winston-Salem's recent efforts to install a GIS system (see article this issue).

Dr. David Godschalk, professor of planning at UNC-CH, described the Triangle J Council of Governments' work toward developing a consistent land classification plan for the tri-county area. In cooperation with Triangle J and the Sierra Club, the planning and geography departments at UNC-CH are using GIS to construct a regional data base capable of supplying accurate, up-to-date land information. Triangle J will use this database to develop a regional land classification system that will enable local decisionmakers to plan more effectively for the regional impacts of growth.

Planning Education: Needs for the Nineties

This session, moderated by David Godschalk, was unique in the conference, as the presentors were divided into two sections, representing the perspective of either a practitioner or an academician.

David Rice, Executive Director of the Redevelopment and Housing Authority of Norfolk, Virginia, set the tone

for the session with his assertion that "planners should do things, not review things." Planning education should not consist solely of policy analysis, he stated, but needs to include a much greater emphasis on physical planning. This refocusing would provide students with a better understanding of how cities develop and serve as a basis for practitioners in using land use regulations and zoning ordinances as tools to shape the urban environment. Rice also stressed the importance of balancing professional skills with exposure to human development skills. The ability to negotiate and to work as a team have become crucial, as the role of a planner is increasingly becoming that of a manager.

Although Wilbur Smith Associates is primarily an engineering consulting firm, Dennis Daye described his use of the broad base of skills he acquired at DCRP in his position as the company's Planning Director. He outlined five components of a planning education necessary to give practitioners the ability to function effectively.

A crucial part of any planning curriculum, according to Daye, is legal training. Decisions planners make about zoning and the issuance of permits, for example, require a strong understanding of the legal system in order to be successfully defended in court. Similarly, a familiarity with environmental issues facilitates communication with environmental experts about the implications of a planner's actions on air and water quality.

Although social policies have occupied planners for a number of years, Daye stressed that the quality of the physical environment is a crucial determinant of the overall quality of life of a region. The adaptive use and rehabilitation of older buildings, for example, can play an important part in an overall urban revitalization strategy. These issues highlight the importance of land use courses in the planning curriculum.

Courses in economics illuminate the implications of urban policies on a city's economy and an understanding of public finance provides a basis for evaluating types of



Jim Webb receives a warm round of applause as the establishment of a fund in his honor is announced.

public improvements and financing techniques. Finally, Daye echoes Rice's assertion that, along with these more quantitative aspects of a planning education, strong written, oral, and interpersonal communication skills are essential for a practitioner to perform effectively throughout his or her career.

Sergio Rodriguez offered insight into societal trends to which planners need to be prepared to respond. In his presentation, he often referred to specific problems that confront him in his position as Planning Director for the City of Miami, including the homeless population, illegal immigrants, crime prevention, and the special needs of the elderly, minorities, and AIDS victims. Rodriguez believes that the nation is experiencing a resurgence of a social conscience, and this phenomenon may facilitate the ability of planners to address these societal problems in the coming decade. However, due to the diminishing availability of financial resources, practitioners must learn to creatively "do more with less." Rodriguez stressed throughout his discussion that it is imperative to infuse the planning field with a greater number of trained minorities.

According to William McNeil, Director of Planning and Development for the City of High Point, North Carolina, the "new economic realities" the country will face in the nineties will force planners to renew their attention to the plight of the poor, and require the profession to adopt a more wholistic, "interconnected" view of the world. Planners will need to develop managerial and analytical skills to develop effective programs, but in order to be more than just a sophisticated manipulator of data, a planner must have the ability to supersede old models and create new ones when faced with new realities.

Bruce Stiftel, of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Florida State University, introduced the academic perspective. He questioned the applicability of the term "planning," as defined by the APA, Friedman and Hudson, and others, as a label for the diverse group of practicing professionals. He pointed out that many planning school graduates employed as policy analysts or environmentalists, for example, do not consider themselves "planners." Stiftel felt that the curriculum offered by most departments could be expansive enough to encompass the variety of issues faced by planners, but called for an end to the reliance on the "modal examples" usually offered by instructors and a broadening of issues covered in journals. Although a significant portion of professional activity continues to revolve around long-range planning, local land use decisions, and the preparation of documents, the perpetuation of this limited "manifest definition" of planning narrows the frame in which the field and its opportunities are presented to students.

Ralph Gakenheimer continued Stiftel's critique of the limited perspectives offered by most planning curricula

in his description of the field's "tempocentrism." He accused planning schools of concentrating on topics that are "in fashion," such as strategic planning and negotiation, to the exclusion of other issues that may be important.

Gakenheimer teaches Third World transportation planning at MIT, and stated that, in instructing students from developing countries, professors cannot afford to be tempocentric; they must teach both what is "in" and "out" of fashion. In addition, planning departments should not fall into the trap of condemning past thought as "wrong," in an attempt to establish a "state-of-the-art" program.

David Loeks, of Virginia Polytechnic University, concluded the session by stating that, for planning schools, "the mission is broadening." Due to the growing reliance upon technology and the increasing degree of global competition and interdependence, many of the conditions that planners will face in the 1990s remain unknown. Therefore, the overall goal of education should be to train planners to be "generic thinkers and problem-solvers."

Overreliance on the rational model, however, will "train the creativity out of" students. Loeks reasserted the view of the practitioners on the panel in his call for the reintegration of physical design and policy; planning departments must not forget how powerful a tool design is in guiding policy. Training based on empirical knowledge alone is not sufficient. Only by admitting alternate sources of knowledge, such as design, will students be able to develop the wholistic and intuitive framework necessary to adapt to the complex world of the 1990s.

Final Events

Following the panel presentations, two tours were offered. Pearson Stewart, Vice President for Planning of the Research Triangle Foundation conducted a tour of the Research Triangle Park. Roger Waldon, Director of Planning for the Town of Chapel Hill discussed "Planning for the Growth of a Large Institution," in his tour of UNC-CH and the Memorial Hospital Medical Complex.

The conference concluded with the annual meeting of the Alumni Association. The agenda included the amendment and ratification of the organization's by-laws, nomination and election of officers, and a discussion of the association's plans for the future. □